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EXECUTIVE COMMITTEE OF THE PROGRAMME OF THE UNITED NATIONS
HIGH COMMISSIONER FOR REFUGEES

Forty-sixth session

SUMMARY RECORD OF THE 506th MEETING

Held at the Palais des Nations, Geneva,
on Friday, 20 October 1995, at 10 a.m.

Chairman: Mr. LARSEN (Denmark)

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GE.95-03509 (E)

The meeting was called to order at 10.20 a.m.

GENERAL DEBATE (continued)

1. Mr. HALIQ (Observer for Saudi Arabia), speaking in exercise of the right of reply, said that the allegations the delegation of Iraq had made the previous day about Iraqi refugees in Saudi Arabia had been groundless. When the Government of Saudi Arabia had given refugee status to Iraqis, it had done so in cooperation with other Governments and UNHCR, in order to enable refugees to be transferred to safe places. It was not logical to try to hurt those unfortunate refugees. Saudi Arabia wanted to give them the security they did not have in their own country. Perhaps the High Commissioner remembered her visit to one of the refugee camps, when she had said that it was a city in itself with all the necessary conditions for a safe and dignified life. That statement in itself refuted the claim made by Iraq.

2. It was enough to refer to document A/AC.96/846/Part V/12, which spoke of the cooperation between the Saudi Arabian Government and UNHCR. All refugees benefited from full rights, including the right of protection against forced return. Iraq's allegations about the ill-treatment of Iraqi refugees was merely an attempt to cover up violations of the rights of the Iraqi people. Saudi Arabia had always cooperated with various international agencies and had also taken action of its own to deal with refugee crises.

3. Mr. SALMAN (Observer for Iraq), speaking in exercise of the right of reply, said that the statement he had made the previous day had been reported in the media. The Saudi Arabian authorities claimed that the refugee camps were like five star hotels, but, in fact, the poor refugees were being held in detention camps. The Saudi Arabian Government was behaving in an inhuman manner. For example, refugees were being forced to change their religion and were being subjected to various other pressures which were contrary to the principles of Islam. That behaviour had led the refugees to protest and there had been clashes in which eight persons had died.

4. Mr. EL KHARIB (Sudan) said that he wished to clarify his Government's position with regard to Sudanese refugees in neighbouring countries, as reference had been made to them in some statements.

5. Sudan had constantly called for the facilitation of the return of refugees both in the Executive Committee and in regional forums. Some 500 refugees had been voluntarily repatriated as a result of the joint efforts of the Government of the Central African Republic and the Sudan. Those efforts had been supported by UNHCR at the end of 1992. He thanked UNHCR and the Government of the Central African Republic for that achievement. One thousand other Sudanese refugees in the Central African Republic had expressed a wish to return home. The Government of the Central African Republic had agreed to two missions from the Sudan to complete the necessary formalities. UNHCR had always indicated that it did not have the resources or funds to push for voluntary repatriation. Consequently, the number of refugees who wished to return voluntarily had dropped. Some difficulties still existed in respect of the tenders received from transferring airlines. He therefore feared that the number of persons willing to return would

continue to fall. Delegations from the Sudan's neighbour countries might therefore have the impression that the Sudan was not taking the matter seriously.

6. He paid tribute to Kenya's willingness to work with the Sudanese Government to facilitate the return of refugees from Kenya. The Sudanese Government was quite prepared to complete the formalities for voluntary repatriation and recent talks had been held between the Sudan and Kenya on the formalities and details of that repatriation. Peace talks were being held in the Sudan with the rebel movement, under the auspices of the Kenyan President, with a view to a peaceful and lasting settlement to the dispute.

7. Spontaneous return from neighbouring countries had been going on continuously in response to the Government's call for peace within the country. The Government was trying to rehabilitate the regions in the south which had been devastated by war. It was fully aware of its responsibility and was doing everything it could to ensure voluntary repatriation.

PARTICIPATION OF GOVERNMENT OBSERVER DELEGATIONS (agenda item 6) (EXCOM/1995/XLVI/CRP.1)

8. The CHAIRMAN said that, under agenda item 6, the Executive Committee was called upon to consider applications by Government Observer delegations to participate in the work of the Sub-Committees and the informal meetings of the Executive Committee.

9. In accordance with a decision of the Executive Committee in 1988, meetings of the Sub-Committees and informal meetings of the Executive Committee were open to participation by Government Observer delegations which had made formal applications for approval by the plenary. Delegations had been invited to submit their applications to the Secretariat. On the basis of the applications received, the Secretariat had circulated a list (EXCOM/1995/XLVI/CRP.1) for consideration by the Committee.

10. If he heard no objections, he would take it that the Executive Committee approved the list.

11. It was so decided.

CONSIDERATION OF THE PROVISIONAL AGENDA OF THE FORTY-SEVENTH SESSION OF THE EXECUTIVE COMMITTEE (agenda item 7) (EXCOM/1995/XLVI/CRP.2, para. 32 (n))

12. The CHAIRMAN said that, under agenda item 7, the Executive Committee was called upon to consider the draft provisional agenda of its forty-seventh session in 1996 (EXCOM/1995/XLVI/CRP.2, para. 32 (n)). That draft provisional agenda, which was being submitted to the Executive Committee for approval, took account of the recommendations of the Working Group on Executive Committee Working Methods, as adopted by the Sub-Committee on Administrative and Financial Matters.

13. Mr. DENHAM (Observer for Ireland) asked whether the Secretariat could provide a cost analysis of the decisions adopted at Executive Committee meetings.

14. The CHAIRMAN said that the request by Ireland would require further consideration.

15. If he heard no objections, he would take it that the Executive Committee adopted the provisional agenda of its forty-seventh session.

16. It was so decided.

ADOPTION OF THE DRAFT REPORT OF THE FORTY-SIXTH SESSION (agenda item 9) (EXCOM/1995/XLVI/CRP.2)

17. Mr. CHINWANNO (Rapporteur) explained that the draft report of the Executive Committee contained the conclusions and decisions which had been formulated in the Drafting Committee composed of the Friends of the Rapporteur and which reflected the agreement that Committee had reached by consensus.

18. The draft report thus contained four decisions on budget structure and governance, Executive Committee working methods, the introduction of Russian as an official language of the Executive Committee and programme, administrative and financial matters, as well as conclusions on PARinAC, refugees and the environment, refugee women and Economic and Social Council resolution 1995/56 on strengthening the coordination of emergency humanitarian assistance of the United Nations. In addition there were five regional conclusions and two protection conclusions on statelessness and international protection. The Drafting Committee had also considered the programme of work of the Standing Committee in 1996.

19. Mr. HALL (Secretary of the Executive Committee), drawing attention to some corrections agreed on by the Drafting Committee, said that, in paragraph 28 (a), the words "in the region" should be placed after the words "December 1995". Paragraph 28 (e) should read "Requests all parties concerned to continue to cooperate fully ...". In paragraph 30 (a), the word "and" should be added between the words "scope" and "objectives" in the third line.

20. Ms. CLEMENTS (United States of America) proposed that, in paragraph 31 (d), the word "supports" should be added between the words "returnees and" and "the retention".

21. The CHAIRMAN said that, if he heard no objections, he would take it that the Executive Committee adopted the report of its forty-sixth session.

22. It was so decided.

23. Mrs. OGATA (High Commissioner for Refugees) said that attacks on United Nations personnel working in humanitarian emergencies and development activities had led to more than 100 deaths in the past three years, and she attached the utmost importance to the issue of staff security. Statements made by Committee members echoed her own position on the interrelationship between protection and solutions. Today's refugee problem was not purely humanitarian, but was essentially political, with major implications for regional security and stability. It was inherently linked to the eradication

of poverty and the rehabilitation of war-torn societies. The need for a comprehensive approach was vital to deal with the humanitarian, political and socio-economic dimensions of refugee problems.

24. Given the importance of the institution of asylum, she was concerned about recent reports on the possible expulsion of thousands of Palestinians, many of whom had nowhere to go. She urged concerned Governments to take rapid action to avert the problem. Otherwise, she feared that further repercussions in the Middle East region could create a new emergency.

25. UNHCR would continue to work to build consensus on the development of guiding principles to ensure international protection for those fleeing conflict, keeping in mind the importance of a regional approach to complement universal principles and the need for flexibility. She was pleased that the Committee had endorsed UNHCR's proactive approach to voluntary repatriation, while rightly recognizing the constraints. The Committee had also rightly highlighted the linkage between the repatriation of refugees and the rehabilitation of war-torn societies. Unless people were anchored in their communities, it would not be possible to stabilize population movements.

26. Issues of displacement must be put on the development agenda. UNHCR would continue to energize its relationships with development and financial institutions and she would be meeting with the World Bank precisely for that purpose in November 1995.

27. She had taken note of the Committee's support for the implementation of the Partnership in Action process with non-governmental organizations (NGOs), as well as the need to improve UNHCR's monitoring and financial control of its implementing partners, many of which were NGOs.

28. She was grateful for the Committee's agreement on the establishment of the post of Assistant High Commissioner as a means of strengthening UNHCR's management capacities to plan and implement operational strategies. She reiterated her commitment to improved governance and accountability.

29. The need for such dialogue had never been greater. There was also little doubt that the year ahead would be a demanding one. All members of the Executive Committee were aware of the strains on protection, the constraints of solutions, the parameters of prevention and the limits of preparedness, but, in confronting the difficulties which lay ahead, she was comforted by the strong support which they had expressed for her Office. Their financial support was essential. Their political support was indispensable. Heartened by their encouragement, UNHCR would continue to move forward on its humanitarian course.

CLOSURE OF THE SESSION (agenda item 10)

30. After the customary exchange of courtesies, the CHAIRMAN declared the forty-sixth session of the Executive Committee closed.

The meeting rose at 11.05 a.m.